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SUBJECT: TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS: CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

**¶11.** (SBU) On March 27, Poloff met with Ahlem Belhadj and Hafidha Checkir of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD) to discuss their 2002 report on child sexual exploitation, titled "A Situational Analysis of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Tunisia." (NOTE: This report includes official statistics from a 2001 GOT report on the state of children and unofficial analysis of child sexual exploitation and can be found at: [www.ecpatinternational.org/eng/Ecpat\\_inter/projects/monitoring/rabat/tunisia.pdf](http://www.ecpatinternational.org/eng/Ecpat_inter/projects/monitoring/rabat/tunisia.pdf). END NOTE.) Checkir explained that Tunisian laws related to trafficking in persons (TIP) and child sexual exploitation are appropriate and adequate. However, comprehensive application of these laws is sometime limited by overlapping responsibilities among GOT ministries, lack of resources and cultural sensitivities.

**¶12.** (SBU) Belhadj said that many different GOT ministries and departments are involved in combating child sexual exploitation, providing shelter and counseling for victims, and investigating allegations; therefore sometimes coordination was an issue. Since children's issues were moved to the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Family, Children and Senior Citizens (MWAFCSC), some of these problems have lessened. However, Belhadj said it is unclear to what extent, as government statistics have limited distribution. Therefore, they had no new information or details to add to their report, which was completed in 2002.

**¶13.** (SBU) When asked if GOT limitations in this area were due to resources or mentality, Belhadj said both are a problem. The GOT has established a High Commission for the Protection of Children under the MWAFCSC, which has a representative in each of Tunisia's governorates. However, Belhadj said these representatives often lack the staff and material resources to effectively investigate reported abuses, including vehicles to travel outside of major cities. Additionally, abuse cases may spend years in the legal system, due to the complex and time-intensive nature of the Tunisian legal system.

**¶14.** (SBU) Regarding medical care and counseling for victims, Belhadj and Checkir noted that cultural stereotypes about mental health treatment make victims and their families reluctant to utilize such services. Also, the field of child psychology is new in Tunisia and only ten doctors nationwide have appropriate expertise. They said that both citizens and the GOT consider psychological care or counseling to be a luxury, and GOT efforts in the medical field are currently

focused on providing basic health care to all citizens.

¶5. (U) Post has also requested a meeting with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Family, Children and Senior Citizens to obtain more detail on GOT efforts and any available statistical data.

HUDSON